repeat the mantra (when you're stepping out of line) by barbiewrites

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Author's Note:

> unbeta'd, title is from mac demarco's goodbye weekend

Billy stays in Hawkins for the trial and two days, then leaves. Steve leaves with him.

He spends those two days helping Susan. They move things into piles -- trash, sell, keep. It's all for a big yard sale she plans to hold the day Billy leaves.

"It'll help Max not to focus on it all," she explains as they move Neil's old hunting gear into the 'sell' pile.

She finds a job trimming hair across the street from where Joyce, who Susan is *determined* to become friends with, works. Steve spends extra time with Dustin, buys Susan a new pair of shoes, holds Billy tight against his chest in the middle of the night in their hotel room.

They hold hands on the drive back and Billy feels lighter with every mile that separates him and Martin County Prison.

Neil gets seven years in prison. It's unnaturally high, and Billy is positive Hopper has something to do with it, because not even his luckiest stars could give him something like that. His previous assault charges in California helped, as did Susan and Max testifying. Billy prays, for a few nights, for Neil to do what he always does and get in fights so his sentence is extended.

No one visits him.

Billy works as a cook in a bistro downtown, and even though he's convinced 'bistro' is Italian for 'bullshit,' he likes his job. It pays well, and he's pretty good at it, so he tries not to complain when his boss makes him work late.

It's a Thursday, well, Friday, really, at midnight when he walks in. Neil was convicted a month ago, and as much as it bugs Billy to keep thinking of him, he keeps a mental tally of how many days he's been sitting in a four by six concrete room. He hopes the bastard is miserable.

"Hey," Steve says from the doorway of their bedroom, glasses and pyjamas on, socked feet on tile. Billy lifts his head from where he's locking the front door.

"Hey yourself," Billy responds. "You're supposed to be asleep."

"Without *you* ? Naw," Steve pulls the last syllable out dramatically. Billy grins, crosses he room, and wraps his arm around Steve's waist and kisses him.

"I love you," Billy reminds him, and Steve mirrors Billy's grin.

“Likewise,” it makes Billy laugh and push him towards the bed. Steve shuts the lights off while Billy slips into a pair of sweatpants, promises to shower in the morning, then climbs into bed.

They take some time to just *stare* at one another, thinking about things they’d done, the things to come. They talk quietly about their days, and after about fifteen minutes Billy can tell that his boyfriend is fighting to stay awake. He watches Steve nod off, the stress of living on their own slipping from his face.

“I’m gonna marry you one day.”

“Hm?”

“Me. I’m gonna marry you one day.”

Steve chuckles sleepily. “You’re delirious.”

“I’m serious.”

Steve half opens his eyes. “You’re not.”

“Yeah,” he replies defiantly, pulling Steve closer by the hip. “I am,” Billy licks his lips. “You gonna say yes?”

Steve pauses, then nods. “Yeah,” he confirms. “I will.”

Steve Harrington is eighteen and in a brand new place, agreeing to marry someone who’d broken a plate over his head less than two years prior.

He waits three years to pop the question. Billy is working a better job, saving up for culinary school. Steve will be a college graduate in a few months. They’re walking on the beach when Steve reaches out to hold Billy’s hand, out in public, out where anyone could see.

Billy stops dead, and Steve goes as far as their latched hands allow before he’s turning to look over his shoulder. “What?”

“Marry me.” Billy says, like he’s waking up after years of sleeping.

“You got a ring, Hargrove?” Steve challenges, figuring Billy was just fucking around.

“Got one at home, I do.” Billy confirms. Steve’s amused expression drops.

“You’re serious?”

“As a heart attack.”

Steve takes on a dreamy sort of smile. “The hell are we doing out here, then?”

They run home. *Really* run, full sprints down the beach to their house where they rush through the door, and Billy digs around the spice cabinet until he pulls out a little black box. He slides to a knee before Steve, tugging the box open.

“Steve Harrington,” Billy huffs, chest burning for air, “marry me?”

They decide on a Spring wedding, and Billy calls Max so they can schedule it during her spring break and everyone can come down. In March, for the first time, Steve and Billy go back to Hawkins.

Steve brings along a neat stack of printed invitations. In warm, brown letters they read:

With great pleasure,

STEVEN HARRINGTON

&

WILLIAM HARGROVE

Invite you to join them at the celebration of their partnership.

They’re Steve’s idea, and below, he pencils in the date and time and the location. Billy grins as he watches across the diner table, somewhere in Arizona.

Jonathan and Nancy's had been mailed ages before, just to be sure they arrived safely, but each other is delivered by hand. Susan cries, Max jumps around in excitement while simultaneously making fun of the fact he'd had his full name written on the card. Billy goes with Steve to invite the cop, and that's when he asks.

"Your father know about this?"

Billy swallows, crosses his arms over his chest, and squares his shoulders. "He need to?"

Hopper nods. "Fair enough."

He knows he should let it go, that he should go back to forgetting Neil but he has the inescapable feeling that Neil feels, still, like he's *won* . Billy wants to make sure he knows he lost.

He takes a spare invite, seals it up, then drives forty five minutes east to the county prison with Steve's hand in his.

Neil hasn't had a visitor since he got locked up.

They meet in a big room, glass windows on the door. A woman talks to her boyfriend in the far corner, and two guards stand at each door. Billy takes a seat as far away from anyone as he can.

He watches as his father comes through one door. They make eye contact and Billy feels eight years old again.

He's let through the second door then slowly makes his way to Billy's table, takes a seat across from him, and Billy takes a moment to notice a few things about him. He's clean shaven, his hair is neat. It makes Billy *angry* .

He lifts his hands, places the envelope on the table and slides it over to his father wordlessly. Billy takes comfort in the sounds of Neil's handcuffs jingling as he pick it up and begins tearing the seam open. He can hear Neil swallow as he reads the words. Neil places the invite back on the table.

"You should be ashamed of yourself."

Billy swallows, almost smirks. "We're havin' it on the beach. Got a priest and everything."

"No God fearing priest would *ever* promote something as two men trying to ruin the sanctity of marriage, Billy."

Billy stacks his elbows on the table.

"Like you know about the sanctity of marriage," Billy scoffs.

"This is why your mother killed herself," he says slowly. "So she'd

never have to see this."

Billy shakes with emotion. His hands squeeze one another, desperately attempting not to crack. Nothing, except maybe Steve or Max, gets to him like his mother does.

It's a long pause before either man speaks again.

"Is this all you came for?" Neil asks, slowly picking up the invite once more. "To *invite* me?"

"No." Billy responds, eyes carefully trained as he raises the note and slowly tears it in half. He swallows as the paper turns from one to two and then lifts his eyes to focus on his father's face.

They blink at one another, and Neil rips the halves to quarters, stacks them, slides them across the table to sit in front of Billy.

"Ask me how you lost."

"No."

"Why? Scared I'll tell you the truth?"

"William --"

“It’s Billy,” he says sharply. “Ask me.”

“How did I lose, Billy?” He asks casually, then relaxes into his seat.

“I get to go home,” he says, “and fall asleep next to the man I love. I get to go home and do what I love, be with who I love. I get to go home and be proud of who I am, and what the *fuck* you put me through,” he takes a shaking breath, his finger pointed right onto the table as he finished his sentence. “I don’t go home scared anymore. I never have to think about whether or not I’m going to be struck by someone who is supposed to *love* and *protect* me. I get to be with someone who loves me *back* , something *you* said would *never* happen, something *you* said I *didn’t* deserve.” Billy wets his lips quickly. “I don’t even *think* about you anymore,” he admits, and smiles when he does. “I get to go home and have everything I ever dreamed of while you rot in here.” Billy’s hand covers the four slips of paper, picks them up, then stands.

“That’s why I came here.”

Billy leaves. He drives back to San Diego with Steve’s hand in his.

They get married on the beach and Steve cries and Billy acts like he doesn’t. They host the reception at an Italian restaurant and after, fall asleep before they can consummate the marriage.

Billy goes to see his mother’s grave the next day. Susan and Max come with, and even though they’ve never met her, they bring

flowers, too.

“I hope I’m making you proud,” Billy admits tearfully in front of her headstone.

They’re getting back into the car when Susan pulls him into a hug.

“I know you are.”